

4. Guidelines for Signs

2022-05-15

a. 20General Information



Figure _____. Well designed and constructed signs are an important part of Pioneer Square's character

The Pioneer Square Preservation Ordinance reflects a policy to focus on structures, individually and collectively, so that they can be seen and appreciated. Sign proliferation or inconsistent sign design, location or colors, for example, are incompatible with this focus, and are expressly to be avoided.

At the same time, signs are an important part of the District's character and can enhance or diminish an existing building's historical authenticity and a new building's visual compatibility with its surroundings. Many of the district's signs are one-of-a-kind, custom fabricated and/or artworks. One traditional characteristic of many of the District's signs are that they fit with the building's architectural elements in terms of location and orientation to surrounding architectural elements, imagery, type styles, and materials.

All signs on or hanging from buildings, in windows, or applied to windows, are subject to review and approval by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board. Locations for signs shall be in accordance with all other regulations for signage.

The intent of sign regulations is to ensure that signs relate physically and visually to their location; that they not hide, damage, or obscure the architectural elements of the building; that they signs be oriented toward and promote a pedestrian environment; and that the products or services offered be the focus of business-related signs.

Signs are addressed in the following categories:

- Permanent building name signs - that are often part of the building façade, such as a sign on a cornice in the same materials of the cornice itself.
- Blade signs – that extend perpendicularly from the building facade

- Sign Bands - which are located on a horizontal strip on the front building façade, generally immediately above the ground floor.
 - Window signs located within a storefront the ground floor window area.
 - Directories which are pedestrian scaled plaques or kiosks that list the businesses or occupants located within the building.
 - Wall signs
 - Signs on awnings and canopies
 - Sandwich board signs
 - Other miscellaneous signs and banners, usually of a temporary nature,
- Neon light elements are discussed as parts of the sign types identified above.

b. Sign application requirements

- i. Sign Application The sign guidelines in this sub-section are intended to clarify application requirements for proposed signs and to facilitate the review process.

A sign application is required for all new or modified signs and all new buildings that will feature signs. The purpose of the sign application requirements below is to allow the Board to visualize and consider the composition and extent of proposed signs and the signs' relationship to the building and the building's surroundings.

A sign application shall include:

- Drawings or photo illustrations of all building elevations where existing or new signs are proposed with all sign locations, types, sizes, materials, colors, illumination, and other characteristics covered in these guidelines indicated in word and visual descriptions.
- Material and color samples,
- Graphic layout including logos. Lettering and other artwork,
- Mounting methods and details.
- Illumination, including neon and tube lighting.
- Other characteristics as determined by the Board
- If the businesses and tenants of the building are not known at the time of application, it is not necessary to indicate the specific messages pertaining to future occupants. However, when signs for businesses or tenants are installed, they must adhere to the provisions of the approved sign application.
- The Board may request additional information if it finds it necessary to make a determination

- ii. Building Sign Plan for proposed new buildings

Applicants for signs on new buildings (prior to permitting and construction) must prepare and submit a "Building Sign Plan" application which indicates the information above in sub-section "i" for a whole building. If such a Building Sign Plan is approved, then when individual signs are

applied for, the applications will only be reviewed only for consistency with the Plan. If the specifics of the individual signs to be installed are not known, the Sign Plan should at least indicate maximum size, location, allowable materials, mounting method, configuration, and potential illumination for each sign. When future tenants apply for signs, the review process will be much simpler.

c. General sign guidelines

Rationale, Context, and Intent

The intent of the guidelines below is to establish standards that pertain to all signs and signage in the District.

Guidelines

- i. The number, location and type of signs must be considered as a composition. That is, the design character of the signs should not clash with one another; the signs must not overlap, compete with, or duplicate one another, and each sign should be directed to a unique purpose or viewpoint.
- ii. Number of signs. The number of signs for a particular business, activity or building is controlled in order to:
 - Ensure that the District's architectural resources are not obscured,
 - To present a pleasing visual experience for the pedestrian.
 - To most effectively provide for the visibility of businesses and activities,
 - To reduce the proliferation of unnecessary signs and visual clutter, and
 - To provide for pedestrian wayfinding,
 - To avoid message duplication.

To achieve the objectives above, the number of signs is based on allowing signs that provide viewing and wayfinding from at least 2 viewpoints:

1. A pedestrian's viewpoint walking along a sidewalk adjacent to a building's façade (one sign or sign face for each direction) and,
2. A pedestrian's viewpoint from across the street (directly facing the main building façade).

Based on this rationale, the maximum number of types of signs are stated below.

One (1) Permanent building name sign or building plaque or medallion per building (See Section d.). A building name sign may be located on a side band.

And

One (1) sign facing a pedestrian travelling toward a business along the adjacent sidewalk in either direction. This could be either a blade sign (See Section e.) or signs on the face of awnings or canopies perpendicular to the building front (See Section k)

And

One (1) sign band for the building or one (1) sign band for a business or activity entry. Alternatively, one sign on an awning or canopy facing the street may be permitted (not including signs on the face of awnings or canopies perpendicular to the building front per the above). (See Section f.)

And

One (1) or more ground floor window signs per business subject to window coverage and transparency requirements. (See Section g.). Businesses located on a street intersection may have one or more window signs on that building façade. Additionally, a business may have additional neon signs per Section g,iii.

And

Signs necessary for wayfinding to upper story businesses. A building may have one (1) tenant directory per entrance to upper floors. (See Section i.).

And

One (1) wall sign per façade of an existing building, only where the primary purpose of the sign is for pedestrian wayfinding to a business that provides service to walk-in customers.

And

One (1) Sandwich board sign per business.

And

Other miscellaneous signs and banners of a temporary nature that meet the intent of these guidelines as determined by the board

- iii. All signs must meet the provisions of these guidelines, SMC 23.66.160, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections and Seattle Department of Transportation standards.
- iv. To retain the historic and architectural character of the District, new flashing, scrolling, or moving signs are prohibited in the District. Electronic signs using a technology that was not available before 1940 are also prohibited. LED and other energy saving luminaires are acceptable if they do not provide a quality of lighting (such as bright, highly focused spotlighting) that was not available before 1940.
- v. New signs shall not cover over architectural features of contributing or supporting buildings. They may be incorporated into a building's façade where there is a façade element, such as a sign band, that is fashioned to accomplish that purpose. Sign attachments, brackets, etc. must be mounted in mortar joints if feasible. Electrical conduit and other accessories and equipment must be located and configured to minimize visual impacts to the building.
- vi. Exposed tube neon and similar tube configured lighting elements are permitted only as signage and shall not be used as decorative building trim. . The use of neon for artwork and logos is

encouraged as part of window or blade signs if the Board finds that such elements are appropriate for the context.

- vii. Signs must not extend above the top of a building or interrupt the skyline.

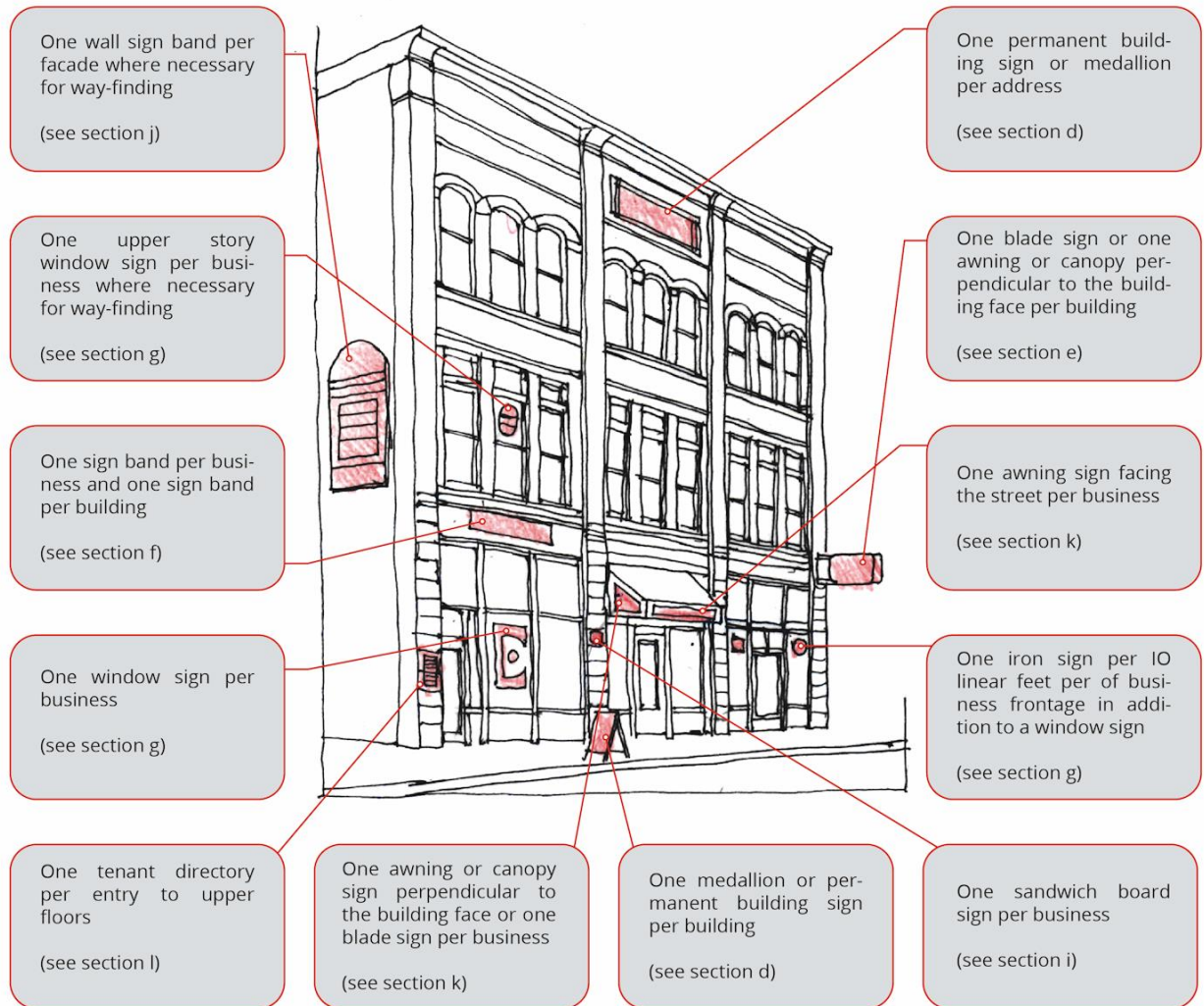


Figure xxx. Illustrative example of allowable sign locations. See text for the actual requirements. (DRAFT DWG TO BE UPGRADED. Yifan may have upgraded this check with him. I would like to lose the bubbles and grey background and move the text bits around so that they do not overlap.)

d. Permanent Building Name Signs

Rationale, Context, and Intent

Permanent building name signs – which are those that identify the name of the building, are constructed of durable materials, and are integrally part of the building's façade.



Figure __. Examples of permanent building name signs

Guidelines

- i. General. Existing building name signs on Contributing and Historic Buildings shall not be altered or removed.
- ii. Location. New permanent building name signs shall be integrated into the building façade (generally, but not always, near the roof line or just above the ground floor main entry to upper story tenants.) New building name signs must not extend above the building façade's top or parapet. The name of a building may also be displayed on the sign band (see section "d" below) or on a plaque or "medallion" less than 2 square feet in area. Building name signs must be on the primary façade with the main building entry and located so that it does not compete with the location for storefront signage.



Figure _____. A building plaque of “medallion” shown here may also be used to indicate a buildings name.

- iii. Dimensions. The dimensions of new permanent building name signs shall be as approved by the Board and shall be no larger than 60 SF as measured by a rectangle encompassing the sign. The Board may allow a departure from this area limit for an unusual circumstance where there is a compelling reason.
- iv. Illumination. New building name signs shall not be internally illuminated or include neon lighting.
- v. Lettering. Lettering shall be as approved by the Board and be no more 20” in height if the sign is located along the building cornice and is greater than 35’ above grade. Otherwise, the lettering shall be no more than 10” in height unless there is a demonstrated need to view the sign from greater than 100’ away.
- vi. Color and Materials. The sign shall be constructed of the materials of the façade on which it is located. (e.g.: building name signs on a masonry building should be constructed of a material that is similar in nature to masonry, such as cast or carved stone). Sign colors must be the same as or similar to the façade materials and as approved by the board. All materials shall be permanent and easily maintainable.
- vii. Message. Permanent building name signs may not advertise a specific business, although they may indicate a public institution such as a post office or governmental offices.

e. Blade Signs

Rationale, Context, and Intent

Blade signs are signs that project out perpendicularly from a building façade and are supported by or hung from horizontal brackets. Usually, they identify a business, organization, or activity. They are often prominent features on contributing and supporting buildings.

Signs made of fabric or flexible material and hung perpendicularly from the building as in a rigid blade sign are also considered blade signs.



Figure xxx. A traditional blade sign on the left and contemporary blade signs with neon

Guidelines

- i. Location. Blade signs shall be installed below the top of the second floor of the building, and in such a manner that they do not hide, damage, or obscure the architectural elements of the building.
- ii. Dimensions Blade signs are limited to eight (8) square feet.
- iii. Illumination. Blade signs incorporating neon or similar tube-oriented lighting shall be permitted provided all the following conditions are met:
 - The neon blade sign is sought as part of an overall sign plan for the business.
 - Electrical connection from exterior walls to the blade sign shall be made using rigid, paintable electrical tubing painted to match the building facade and all bends shall closely follow the support structure.
 - The wiring and connections shall be internal to the sign and not be visible
 - All neon elements shall be supported by a rigid, opaque backing and framework. (See Figure ____ of a contemporary blade sign for a positive example.):
 - LED lights may be approved provided they produce the same visual character of lights common before 1940.
- iv. Lettering. Letter size in blade signs shall be consistent with the scale of the architectural elements of the building (as per SMC 23.66.160) but shall not exceed a maximum height of 10 inches unless an exception is approved by the Board. Logos and other graphic devices may be larger. Exceptions to the 10-inch height limitation will be considered for individual letters in the business name (subject to a limit of no more than three letters) only if the Board finds that the sign fit within the building's architectural details
- v. Color and Materials. Blade signs on Contributing and Historic buildings shall be made of materials that were available before 1940s such as wood, glass, and metal. Painted opaque,

panel materials such as rigid polymer panels may also be acceptable if the finishes visually resemble the materials noted above and are approved by the Board.

- vi. Signs made of fabric or flexible material and hung perpendicularly from the building are permitted provided that the material is durable, and the colors are not subject to rapid fading. Such signs must be supported top and bottom with a rigid mounting.
- vii. All signage supports shall be fastened to the exterior wall using metal anchors at existing grout joints only; and the sign taken as a whole is consistent with the scale and character of the building and all other conditions under SMC 23.66.160.



Figure____. An example of an appropriate blade sign made of fabric.

f. Sign Bands

Rationale, Context, and Intent

A sign band is an area located on some buildings in the zone above storefront windows and below second floor windows designed to display signage. The intent of this provision is to allow attractive signs consistent with the character and architectural features of the building; and to provide inviting announcement of the business or activity.



Figure ____, Two sign bands, note the locations, subdued colors, and variation in size.

Guidelines

- i. General. Sign bands on existing buildings are permitted only where there is an existing horizontal area between the first and second floors or on a horizontal storefront element to accommodate a sign band. Such an area is sometimes called a first-floor cornice or lintel. Sign bands may also be located within a storefront as shown in Figure ____ directly above. New sign bands must not cover or obscure existing architectural features. New building name sign bands are not allowed where there is already a permanent building name sign.
- ii. Location. Above the ground floor storefront and below the second floor only.
- iii. Dimensions. maximum height of the sign band shall be 24 inches high unless otherwise approved by the Board.
- iv. Illumination. Exterior illumination is permitted. Internally lit sign bands are not permitted.
- v. Lettering. Maximum height is 18 inches unless otherwise approved by the Board.
- vi. Color and Materials. Materials must be durable. Materials for Contributing and Supporting buildings shall be made of materials that were available during the period in which the building was constructed, such as wood, glass, and metal. Painted opaque panel materials such as rigid

polymer panels may also be acceptable if visually similar to the traditional materials and if approved by the Board.

- vii. For new buildings individual letters serving as a sign band may be acceptable if they are appropriately located on a place provided in the Building Sign Plan as described in subsection “b” and approved by the Board..

g. Window Signs

Rationale, Context, and Intent

Window signs are semi-permanent signs affixed directly to a window. The intent of window sign guidelines is to provide for pedestrian oriented signage without modifying the architecture of a building and allowing visibility into the interior space.

Guidelines

- i. General. Window signs are subject to Board approval and must comply with transparency requirements.
- ii. Location. Ground floor window signs must be located approximately at or below eye level (generally below 8 feet above grade). Window signs must not be located on the storefront transom windows (the smaller windows situated directly above the main ground floor windows, usually designed to allow daylight into the business interior.)

Window signs are not allowed above the ground floor

- iii. Dimensions. Signs mounted in windows must allow people see what the business offers inside as well as maintain a visual connection from the inside to the outside and be compliant with the transparency guidelines in Sections 1 and 2. In no case shall any window be covered more than 25% with signage. If more than one window sign per storefront facing the same street is proposed, the total coverage shall be less than 10% of the total window area. Films and other materials that reduce visibility into the business interior are not allowed.



Figure____. The single window sign on the left is limited to a maximum of 25% coverage. Two or more signs, such as illustrated on the right, are limited to 10% of the total window area. Note that for the sign on the left, the area of the sign can be measured by adding the circumscribed rectangles around each of the two texts and the circumscribed rectangle around the graphic thimble.

Buildings on street corners may treat each façade separately. That is, the maximum coverage for each façade shall be as noted directly above.

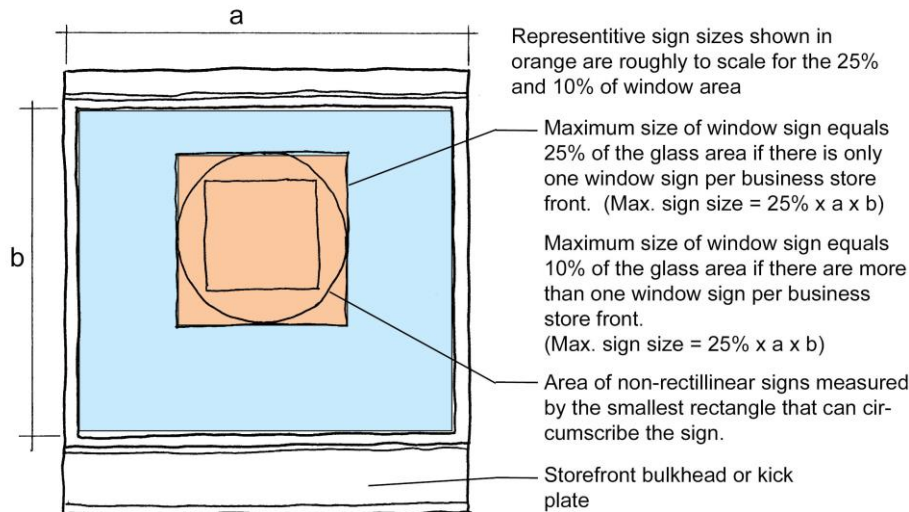


Figure xxx. Measurement of window signs.

The dimensions of window signs will be measured by circumscribing a rectangle around the sign, including graphics. The effective sign area will be taken as the area of the rectangle. The Board may grant exceptions to this measurement method in cases where it finds the proposal has exceptional quality of artistry. In such a case, if a window sign includes two or more text boxes or a graphic element, the sign area may be taken to be the sum of circumscribed rectangles around each of the text or graphic elements.

For establishments where interior seating and/or tables are adjacent to the windows, window signs may occupy up to 50% of the window area that is below 42" above the floor to provide some view buffering below table height. The maximum height of this sign to cover areas below table height is 10 inches.

For the area above this the sign allowed below table height, the maximum coverage limits stated above (25% of window surface if one window, 10% if more than one window) shall be calculated for the window area above 42" above the sidewalk grade. In addition to the signs and maximum sign coverages described above, establishments may also feature one menu or daily service announcement up to a 1 square foot maximum size.

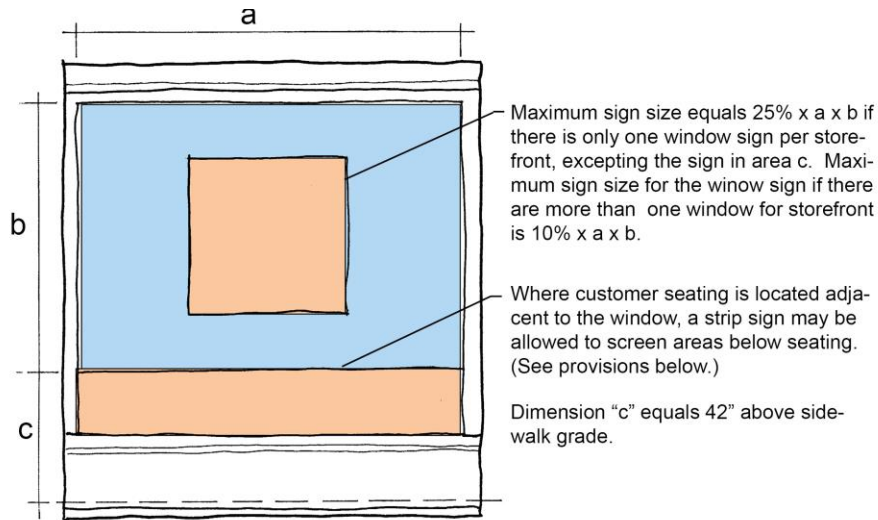


Figure xxx. Maximum sign window sizes with seating against a window

- iv. Neon lighting elements in windows may be approved if they adhere to other provisions in this Section 4. Neon signs will be counted as part of the sign area which must be within the maximum window coverage limits of provision iii, above.
- v. Lettering. Lettering shall be no higher than 10 inches, although artwork and non-corporate locally owned logos may be larger. The Board may consider exceptions to the 10-inch height limitation for individual letters in the business name subject to a limit of no more than three letters.
- vi. Color and Materials. Window signs must not be susceptible to fading or deterioration. Paint and gold leaf are generally acceptable, as are vinyl film and other durable synthetic products, subject to iii above and vii below.
- viii. Temporary signs in windows: All temporary window signs allowed under SMC23.66.160D must comply with the window sign guidelines. Permitted temporary signs must be removed upon occupancy or within the timelines provided in SMC23.66.160D2.



Figure xxx. Two window signs that provide a screen for tables or seating next to a window.

h. Banners and Flags

Rationale, Context, and Intent

Banners and flags are semi-permanent signs that are generally constructed of flexible materials. They are located and attached on buildings to be easily removable. Signs constructed of flexible materials such as fabric that are mounted permanently on a building are blade signs covered in Section e.

The intent of guidelines for banners and flags is to allow signs and displays that do not detract from a building's architectural quality but do promote businesses, events, and sports teams while adding to the streetscape's visual interest.

The US and Washington State flags are not subject to these guidelines if they are properly and respectfully displayed. However, the Board will still review the installation of a flag holder or other attachment.

Guidelines

- i. General flags and banners must be easily removable. Flags and banners shall not have any text on them, and the size of the flag or banner must be consistent with the character and scale of the building, the frontage of the business, and the scale of surrounding buildings. Banners (either temporary or permanent) that are draped across buildings are prohibited.
- ii. Location: Banners and flags shall not be mounted above the first floor .
- iii. Dimensions: Banners and flags shall not exceed 6 feet in the longest dimension and shall not be larger in area than 18 square feet.

- iv. Illumination. Banners and flags shall not be illuminated except for US and Washington State Flags.
- v. Lettering: Lettering is not allowed unless it is part of a logo or symbol.
- vi. Color and Materials: Banners and flags must consist of durable, flexible material and securely mounted to avoid creating a hazard.
- vii. Attachments must be in mortar joints and as approved by the Board.

i. Building and Tenant Directories

Rationale, Context, and Intent

Signs located on upper stories to advertise upper story businesses have the potential to cause visual clutter and detract from a building's architecture. Where upper story businesses and other activities require signage, it is preferable to provide signage at ground level. If there are multiple businesses requiring pedestrian oriented signage, a directory can indicate the location and type of services provided by businesses and activities that do not have at grade street front exposure.



Figure xxx. Example of a directory

Guidelines

- i. Location. Directories must be located on the ground floor, roughly at eye level.
- ii. Dimensions: A directory sign for an individual building tenant, business, or activity shall not be greater than 1 square foot per business or tenant.

- iii. Illumination. Directories must not be back lit. Front lighting from an external source is acceptable.
- iv. Lettering. Lettering shall not be larger than 6 inches in height. Logos and other graphic devices may be larger, subject to Board approval.
- v. Color and Materials. Directories must be made of durable, vandal resistant materials.

j. Wall Signs

Rationale, Context, and Intent

Wall signs are signs that are attached to a non-street facing wall or a wall without ground floor windows. The intent of these guidelines is to permit well designed and constructed wall signs in appropriate locations on existing buildings.

Murals. Murals that do not specifically advertise or relate to a business, product or service are not signs and are not covered in this section.

Guidelines

- i. General: Wall signs are only allowed on buildings constructed before January 2022. The rationale for this provision is that opportunities for signage within new buildings can be integrated into the building in several ways without requiring a wall sign.
- ii. No wall signs with moving images, or billboards for products are allowed.-No wall signs for products or off premise businesses are allowed.
- iii. Location: Wall signs are only allowed where the primary purpose is for pedestrian wayfinding for a business that provides service to walk-in customers and generally only on first or second floor facades. A wall sign must relate to or direct pedestrians to the business entrance. Wall signs may be permitted on ground or second floors of building facades adjacent to and facing an alley. The board may allow wall signs in other locations where necessary for pedestrian orientation.
- iv. Wall signs are only permitted where they do not cover or change architectural features such as windows, entries, storefronts, pilasters cornices, friezes etc.
- v. Dimensions: Wall signs shall be sized to be compatible with the character of the district and appropriate for viewing by a pedestrian, as determined by the Board. Wall signs should be only as large as necessary to indicate to a pedestrian the business name, logo, type of business and location and no larger than 240 square feet in total area. The area of wall signs must also not exceed 10% of the façade area. An applicant for a wall sign must submit to the Board, a visualization, to scale, indicating the sign's overall dimensions, location, and design, as well as its relation to the whole building façade on which it is proposed. The Board may require that the sign be reduced or altered in size from that of the proposal to better fit with its pedestrian oriented context. Such considerations include but are not limited to: location, materials, colors of the building and surroundings, visibility of the sign from pedestrians at street level, the building's architectural characteristics, its size, and location of other signs.

- vi. Illumination: Wall signs shall not be internally lit. Wall signs may be externally lit to a light level of 1 foot candle/square foot.
- vii. Lettering: letter sizes shall be appropriately scaled and be legible by the pedestrian at a near-by intersection, as determined by the Board. Generally, lettering that is at least 1 inch high for every 10 feet of viewing distance is legible.
- viii. Color and Materials: Wall signs shall be painted on a wood, metal or permanent panel backing and attached in such a manner that the building surface is not damaged. Signs must not be painted directly on unpainted masonry. Colors and graphics of wall signs shall be compatible with the character of the District, as determined by the Board. Bright or “neon” colors are not acceptable over large surfaces. The Board may require the color palette to be modified with more muted tones.



Figure ____ Examples of wall signs that feature appropriate height, size, color, location, and legibility.

k. Awning, Canopy and Hanging Signs

Rationale, Context, and Intent

This section addresses signs on or attached to pedestrian weather protection elements including fabric awnings, structural canopies, and similar devices. The intent is to permit well designed and constructed signs on these elements that are consistent with a building’s architecture, other signs on the building and the District’s character.



Figure ____ . An example of an acceptable awning sign (left) and a canopy sign (right).

Guidelines

- i. General. Messages on awning and canopy signs are limited to the name of the business, organization, or activity and the address.
- ii. Location. Signs on canopies or awnings must be on the vertical surface and not extend above or below the front of an awning's vertical surface. Signs may be located on the surface of an awning or canopy perpendicular to the building's façade. (I.e.: on the "return" of the awning or canopy), provided the business or activity does not also feature a blade sign. See sub-section iv for signs "hanging signs" hung from canopies)



figure ____ . An example of an appropriate sign on the "return" of a canopy (left) and an acceptable and suitably mounted hanging sign (right).

- iii. Dimensions. Canopy or awning signs mounted on the face of the canopy or awning must fit within the dimensions of the canopy's or awning's vertical surface and not extend above or below the structure of the awning or canopy.

- iv. One hanging sign per business, mounted perpendicular to the building face and under a canopy may be allowed in lieu of a sign mounted directly on an awning or canopy. Such hanging signs may be externally, but not internally, illuminated.
- v. Lettering size. Lettering on canopies, awnings and hanging signs is limited to 10" in height.
- vi. Illumination. No internal illumination is allowed on awnings, canopies or hanging signs. Backlit awnings are specifically prohibited.
- vii. Color, Materials and Construction. Materials and construction must be durable and easily maintainable. Colors must complement colors of other signs, awnings and canopies and storefront trim as approved by the Board .

I. Sandwich Board Signs and Other Signs Located in the Public Right of Way

Rationale, Context, and Intent

Sandwich board or "A-Board" signs are small, self-supporting, and portable signs located on sidewalks constructed of two panels which are advertise a business and are located directly in front of that business. The intent is to allow well designed and constructed sandwich board signs that are located where they do not impede pedestrian movement.



Figure ____ . Examples of a sandwich board or A-board signs

Guidelines

- i. General When multiple businesses, including upper floor businesses, share a common entrance, a single shared sandwich board sign may be allowed in lieu of multiple, individual signs. Such signs shall be limited to one per entrance to the shared location.
- ii. Sandwich board signs shall occupy the sidewalk only during business hours and must not be chained to trees, parking meters, etc. They shall also comply with all other regulations for signs in Pioneer Square.

- iii. Location. Sandwich board signs shall be located directly in front of the business frontage either next to the building face or at the street side of the sidewalk by newsstands, streetlights, or other amenities. Signs shall not impair pedestrian flow and must comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Sandwich board signs shall be limited to one per address.
- iv. Dimensions. Sandwich board signs shall be a minimum of two feet high and a maximum of four feet high and be a maximum of two- and one-half feet wide.
- v. Illumination. Sandwich board signs shall not be illuminated or otherwise electrified.
- vi. Lettering. Letter size is restricted to 10 inches in height.
- vii. Color, Materials and Construction. Sandwich boards must be a free-standing A-frame type sign to allow a horizontal component such as a chain or bar to hold the sign in place the chain or bar must be between 3 to 8 inches above the ground and secured on all four sides to accommodate high winds and sight impaired persons. .
- viii. Sandwich Board signs shall be constructed of durable, rigid materials such as wood or polymer panels. If not constructed of wood, the signs must be painted or finished to look like wood. Sign surfaces that allow temporary messages such as chalk boards are acceptable
- ix. Temporary or permanent signs on or in outdoor cafes and seating areas, such as signs hung on railings are prohibited.



Figure _____. Examples of signs hung on a café seating area railing. This type of sign is prohibited.